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ABSTRACT

The paper is addressed to teaching staffs and administrative offices of local school districts and emphasizes the leadership initiatives which should be exercised by local school district personnel to implement career education. The paper is organized into three major sections: (1) a description of a conceptual framework for studying and analyzing implementation problems, (2) a list of some common local career education implementation problems, and (3) guidelines for resolving these problems. In the conceptual framework for analyzing implementation problems, four domains of activities are specified: innovation characteristics, client (setting) characteristics, advocate characteristics and implementation strategies. Problems in the nature and definition of career education appear to be present in both rural and urban communicates. The nine generic local implementation problems are identifed as: (1) lack of definition, (2) confusion between vocational education and career education, (3) non-uniform materials, (4) responsiveness of teachers, (5) responsiviness of community representatives, (6) continuation of activities, (7) lack of evaluation data, (8) lack of planning, and (9) lack of role definition. The guidelines suggested for resolving problems are: start small and grow, substitute rather than add on, defining the career education concept, delegate authority, build alliances, recognize contribution, and use consultants wisely. (Author/AJ)

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Implementing Career Education in School Districts: An Analysis of Problems and Perspectives

William L. Hull

This paper addressed the implementation of career education in school districts because most students, both young and old, enroll and learn via local classes. Theories and hypotheses about career education are useful to the extent they can be translated into viable learning experiences for students. The important aspects of career education implementation emphasized in this paper are leadership initiatives which should be exercised by local school district personnel. Parents, business, industry, and labor representatives among others are vital to career education, but they do not have the same obligation for implementation strategies as employees of the school district. Therefore, this paper is addressed to teaching staffs and administrative officers of local school districts.

The delimitation of this paper to local district activities does not depreciate the critical role of state education agency coordinators of career education in any way. Nor should it imply any de-emphasis on career education activities conducted by intermediate service units. An effective strategy for implementing career education requires systematic leadership at all levels of education. For example, I have observed a coalescence of support around the

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U.S. Office of Career Education Policies as they relate to the definition of "career education." Such action is essential if the U.S. Congress and state legislatures are to provide policy guidelines and funds for career education implementation.

The paper is organized into three major sections: (1) a section describing a conceptual framework for studying implementation problems, (2) a listing of some of the more common local career education implementation problems, and (3) some guidelines for resolving these problems.

Some of the theoretical conceptualizations of educational change authorities such as Clark and Guba (1974) and Rogers and Rogers (1976) were used in the formulation of a conceptual framework for analyzing career education problems. The sub-dimensions of the framework are identified. The data base for this paper comes from the comments of local project directors who used a handbook for developing implementation strategies (Hull and McCaslin, under development). This project is sponsored by the National Institute of Education. Sixty-five elementary and secondary school career education directors in over thirty states used this handbook either in the field or with simulation exercises. Their comments and the insights gained from a study of the Comprehensive Career Education Model (CCEM) (1974) form the basis of these remarks.

Career education became visible across the nation when Sidney P. Marland, Jr. then Commissioner of Education issued a call for educational reform early in 1971. Career education was proposed as a means of making basic academic skills more relevant to the needs of students, and improving the self-understanding and career decision-making skills of youth and adults when they exit the system. Career education was proposed as a concept, not a program. State and local educators were asked to operationalize this concept into tangible activities for students.

The mood of the country during the first half of the 1970's was in favor of educational reform. Unemployment statistics brought a certain compelling logic to the need for career education. Gallup polls consistently have shown parents to be in favor of education which would prepare their children for employment. The momentum of this support for career education has continued to the present. At least fifteen states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington) have enacted legislation endorsing career education in the public schools. Many of these states have appropriated funds for career education. In at least one state this includes categorical funding for implementation. At the federal level, Congressman Perkins introduced House Resolution 11023 (December 4, 1975) to authorize career education programs for elementary and secondary schools.

A Conceptual Framework for Studying Implementation Problems

The positive context for career education emphasizes the need for efficient and effective implementation activities. Much can be learned from problems which have occured across the nation. To analyze these problems, the following conceptual framework was used. Four domains of activities are specified:

1. Innovation Characteristics
2. Client (Setting) Characteristics
3. Advocate Characteristics, and
4. Implementation Strategies

Each domain contains several subdimensions. These are listed in the Hull, et. al. (1973) reference. The subdimensions relevant to career education implementation are explained in the following paragraphs. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

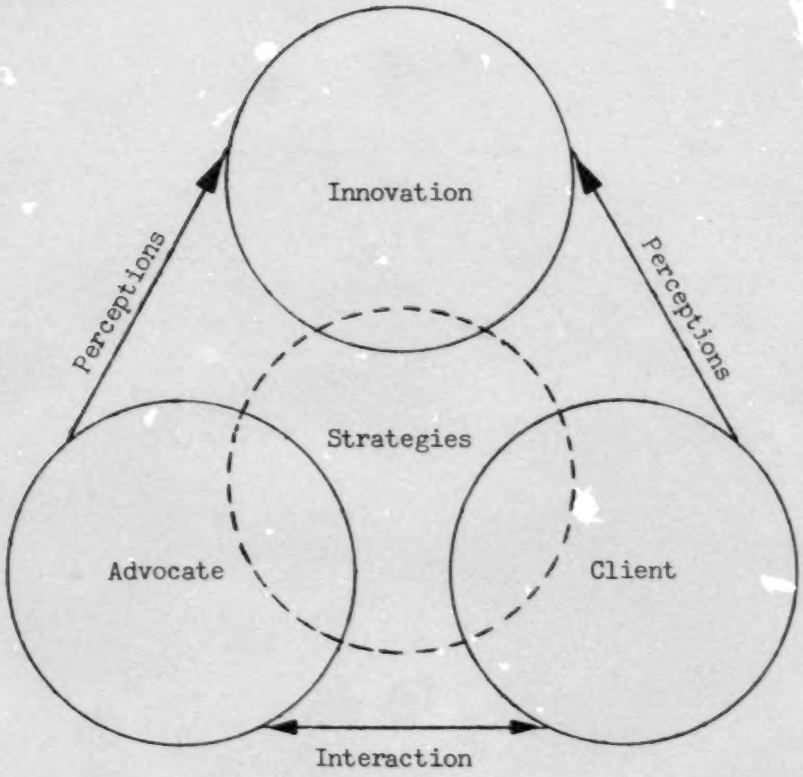

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The paradigm postulates interactions between the advocate and the client, however, the client is defined. The client may be a pricipal of a school who is being asked to release teachers for inservice education instruction. Or the client may be the local chamber of commerce who may be viewing an orientation film on career education. The interaction represents two-way communication which takes place over time. That is, antecedent events impinge upon present and future communications. Figure 1 represents a point in time. The implementation strategy represented by the dotted line, is formulated from perceptions and information gleaned from the other three domains of the framework: the innovation, the client, and characteristics about the advocate. These domains and the subdimensions of the domains which follow were

constructed from administrators' and teachers' perceptions of problems which may occur when innovations such as career education are presented for adoption. Thus, the perceptual base of the framework is individual in nature and does not take into account problems which occur when innovations are presented for collective adoption.

Innovation characteristics. Research at The Center for Vocational Education (CVE) suggests the following five factors to be potential problems for innovation adoption:

1. Resistance to the innovation
2. Operational implementation
3. Concern for student use
4. Probability of success
5. Resource requirements

Most of the subdimensions relate directly to career education. Specific implementation problems in this domain associated with career education are listed later in this paper. But I would like to make some general observations about these subdimensions. Career education has encountered some resistance among teachers and others who did not understand or appreciate the relationship between education and work being promoted via career education. In some cases, this lack of understanding may have been encouraged by the manner in which the concept was forced upon the school staff.

Throughout the developmental and pilot demonstration activities associated with career education a concern for student self-image and career decision-making has been present. However, these projects were not able to determine exactly how students were affected by career education. Evaluation studies of many secondary school programs have had difficulty in measuring student outcomes (GAO, 1976). Without adequate data, it has been very difficult to determine the probability of successful use of career education materials. The lack of adequate evaluation, the limited time frame,

and scarce dollars characterized most projects.

Client characteristics. CVE research has identified five factors perceived as influencial in the acceptance of innovations such as career education by individuals:

1. Economic concern orientation
2. Bureaucratic orientation
3. Activity level
4. Self-reliance
5. Desire for leadership

These factors become useful to advocates of career education once the client has been identified. Individuals considering the possibility of using career education materials possess different traits and aspirations. Motivations for participating in career education activities differ. The career education advocate must assess concerns of the client and represent the innovation in a manner which is appealing and desirable.

Most people desire to perform well on their job. Teachers and administrators are naturally reluctant to accept responsibilities which they consider to be overloads. Adequate time should be allocated to tasks which have been approved as scope of work activities for teachers. School administrators should be informed of all career education activities. The presence of bargaining agents in the schools may mean negotiation prior to the conduct of in-service activities on career education. Some individuals are willing to invest extra effort in activities which appear to be challenging and provide some opportunity for leadership. However, selecting teachers for career education assignments should be done carefully, with full explanation of what is expected! Many of the career education programs visited tended to rely on the discretionary judgment of the coordinator in matters of teacher selection and pilot activities.

Advocate characterisitcs. This is an area of the conceptual framework which staff at CVE recognize as an important aspect of the diffusion and acceptance of innovations. However, very few R&D activities have been conducted in this area at CVE.

Each individual career education project coordinator brings with him or her professional preparation and personal characteristics which influence the effectiveness of the project. In particular, an ability to plan and an orientation to people and tasks need to be present. Frequently, career education project coordinators are called upon to make decisions within limited time frames. The coordinators need to know what is happening in the classrooms and to be able to anticipate the likely impact of decisions on teachers and others influenced by career education activities.

Implementation strategies. One study conducted by Hull and Kester (1975) examined the perceived effectiveness of innovation diffusion tactics. These were not directly related to career education as an innovation. However, judgments were made by teachers and administrators about the perceived effectiveness of specific tactics regardless of the innovation. Professionals similar to career education coordinators perceived informative tactics such as telling or showing to be generally acceptable for implementation activities. Persuasive tactics were rated most effective such as involving people in the development of the project. Tactics considered to be coercive were considered for use by project coordinators as a last resort.

The conceptual framework previously described with the four domains of knowledge was used as a reference for identifying implementation problems mentioned by career education coordinators. The following career education problems can be categorized by these domains although they are not presented in this manner.

The problems listed in this paper are ones which appear to be present across a wide spectrum of situations and conditions. Small rural schools as well as urban communities share these problems.

Problems in the Nature and Definition of Career Education

Lack of definition. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland, Jr. introduced career education as a concept with only vague, general guidelines for implementation. This stimulated much discussion throughout the country, but it resulted in many different definitions of career education from state to state. Educators sometimes changed labels on course materials and instructional sessions without revising much of the content. This may have occurred because no one was certain of the definition of career education. As recently as last year at a meeting of state career education coordinators (Jesser, 1975), a plea was made for state staffs to agree on a definition of career education.

Confusion between vocational education and career education. The lack of understanding about career education may stem in part from the confusion about the funding base. Until the Hathaway Amendment (PL 93-380) in 1974, career education was supported by the federal government primarily through Part C and Part D formula grants to state and local education agencies. Parts C and D are part of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 (PL 90-576). This tended to place vocational educators in positions to make decisions about career education. The development of research and development projects (Part C) and demonstration projects (Part D) tended to show no clear distinction in actual practice according to the GAO report (1976). This lack of systematic development and demonstration added to the confusion about the nature of career education.

Non-uniform materials. Partly as a consequence of this lack of definition about the concept of career education and the diverse directions pursued by some of the states, instructional materials were developed in a somewhat erratic manner. The school-based Comprehensive Career Education Model which started as a capstone effort to pull together existing career education materials turned into a curriculum development project.

Another problem which contributed to the diversity of concepts about career education was the local development of materials. They contained illustrations and examples unique to regional conditions which tended to inhibit their transportability to other parts of the country.

Problems in the Local Settings

Responsiveness of teachers. Teacher reaction to career education has been mixed. Vocational teachers sometimes view career education activities as competitors for funds while academic instructors see career education as a threat to disciplined inquiry. The "infusion" of career education activities into subjects such as foreign languages and art are met with cries of lack of relevance and fears of watered down content. Teacher resistance to career education particulary in secondary schools is documented in the GAO report (1976).

Responsiveness of community representatives. While the comments from career education coordinators interviewed for this paper were very positive about community reactions to their programs in local districts, one class of excepts was documented in another study. The RAND study of educational change (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975) commented on the lack of community support present in the Part D programs funded in Model Cities. They attributed this lack of support to career activities engaged in by a small group of professionals who were not required to develop extensive proposals.

Continuation of activities. The confusion in the purpose of the career education projects (development or demonstration) led to somewhat ambivalent attitudes toward continuation of career education activities. Diffusion of career education activities could not be traced to project activities. Project coordinators were busy trying to develop materials for the short-term projects. Sometimes, the groundwork for continued funding of the activities by the local school district was not performed.

Information obtained in the GAO investigation (1976) indicate that individualized career education experiences for students can be quite costly. High costs and the lack of comparative impact data were problems in the experience-based career education projects.

In some cases, substantial local resources were allocated to continuation of project activities according to Development Associates (1975). Activities which had been throughly integrated into local programs could be very difficult to identify after a couple of years. No project activities could be linked to continuation and diffusion in a meaningful manner in the Development Associates study of Part D exemplary programs.

Problems in Career Education Advocacy

Lack of evaluation data. The lack of data on the impact of career education activities presents a problem for advocates of career education. Without evidence of increased student learning compared to academic programs, it is difficult to convince skeptics of the merit of the concept. The need for improved evaluation was discussed at one of the Mini-Conferences conducted by the Office of Career Education (Miguel, Fromson, and Bohne, 1975). At this conference, the problem of evaluation was linked to the need for a better definition of career education.

A study of graduate and undergraduate programs of career education conducted by McKinney (1975) generated a series of goals and alternative strategies for implementing career education in college and university settings. A review of least-used strategies in these settings tended to confirm the lack of evaluation activities. Evaluation instrumentation and the writing of objectives which can be evaluated are not well developed.

Lack of planning. Consistently, career education project coordinators in local school districts seemed not to be able to plan very far in advance. This may be due to the environmental press or it may be due to a need for project coordinator planning skills. In any event, the sponsors of Part D programs are moving in the direction of planning grants prior to commitments of multi-year duration.

The most recent report from Project Baseline (Lee, 1975) indicates that some Part D exemplary project directors are experiencing difficulty in writing clearly defined goals and objectives, and enlisting wholehearted support of local administrators and teachers. Many of these problems could be alleviated with the development and execution of carefully written project plans.

Lack of role definition. A review of the communication documents associated with the Comprehensive Career Education Model (Hull, et. al., 1974) indicated a need for improved role definitions associated with the coordination of career education activities. This finding tended to be confirmed in conversations with local career education coordinators across the country. Job descriptions need to be written and channels of communication established among persons supervising and conducting career education activities within school districts.

Guidelines for Resolving Implementation Problems

The previous section of this paper identified and briefly discussed career education implementation problems present among a wide variety of school districts. These guidelines are not written for the prescriptive resolution of the specific problems listed. That is, each implementation problem in a school district is unique not only in the career education activity being conducted, but in the circumstances surrounding the implementation process. These guidelines should be perceived as rules of thumb to be used with care and discretion.

Start small and grow. Under conditions of limited resources (time and money), sometimes it is desirable to select a limited target audience for developmental and/or demonstration activities. This concentration of resources should give the project director more control over expenses and allow opportunities for selective dissemination of concepts and materials. The impact of such an implementation strategy should be greater than a diffuse effort which tends to scatter resources.

Substitute rather than add on. One of the common complaints of teachers and administrators regarding the implementation of innovations is the additional work associated with the project. Whenever possible, advocates of career education should seek opportunities for substituting activities for existing practices. The career education concept should be sufficiently attractive to educators to cause them to want to participate in the activities.

Define the career education concept. Local coordinators of career education as well as state coordinators should describe the concept in detail. This allows advocates to select the best features for promotional activities. An explicit definition provides an opportunity for full discussion of project implications.[1]

Delegate appropriate authority. The development of realistic position descriptions based on approved scopes of work is essential to success as a career education advocate. Implementation activities can proceed smoothly only as individuals in key roles establish appropriate lines of communication in the process of achieving pr ject objectives. Distributing authority and responsibility throughout the project staff with appropriate supervision increases the likelihood of successful implementation.

Build legitimate alliances. The implementation of career education requires cooperation among community representatives as well as school staff members. Career education project participants must be concerned about the total school and help with non-career education projects. These alliances usually result in other people learning more about career education.

Provide recognition for contribution. Often the contributions of teachers who work to develop curriculum materials or arrange learning experiences with industry in the community are not recognized. This recognition may take the form of a simple thank you note, an article in the school newspaper or extra pay for hours spent on weekends. Many professionals respond to opportunities for credit who otherwise would not be interested in the project.

Use consultants wisely. The use of outside consultants for orientation meetings which should have been conducted by project staff can disappoint teachers who otherwise might be interested in the project. Consultants should be able to talk with teachers about classroom career education activities. On rare occasions it may be necessary to legitimize a project by inviting a respected person to discuss the merits of career education.

Summary

This paper has attempted to put forth a conceptual paradigm for analyzing implementation problems of career education projects in local school districts. It should be useful to the degree that the four domains of the paradigm can be identified in aspects of the local project. Nine problems associated with the implementation of career education were identified. These were generic in nature and present in a wide diversity of career education sites. Twelve guidelines were written for implementation strategies. These were not prescriptive because each implementation site is unique. An assessment of implementation needs would be required before a specific strategy could be recommended.

The prognosis for career education is quite favorable. National legislation to authorize programs has been introduced, an increasing number of state legislatures have endorsed the concept, and education professionals have begun to incorporate the concepts into instructional activities.

Footnotes

[1]Much progress has been made in the explication and definition of career education. A policy paper from the U.S. Office of Education (Hoyt, 1975) defines career education as "the totality of experiences through which one learns about and prepares to engage in work as part of her or his way of living."

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